This document describes a university-related program to teach social problem solving skills to sixth graders at a predominantly black middle school, which evolved to become a systems linkage intervention. The development of the Social Problem Solving program (SPS) is discussed. The following stages are included: entry into the school system, needs assessment, building of a research team, securing permission of the ethics committee and parents, development of curriculum, training of teachers, development of assessment tools, and classroom training sessions. Further discussion identifies the systems which have been linked with the project and relates the strategies and rationale for the linkages. These systems include the families of the students, the school psychology system, the teaching and administrative staff, and linkages with the university staff and students. (Author)
A Social Problem Solving Intervention and Consultation Program*

Susan McCammon, Shirley Fitz-Ritson, Claudette Felder and Stephanie Pratola

University of South Carolina


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This paper reports on the initiation, delivery and evaluation of a program for positive mental health carried out in an urban public middle school from the Spring Semester, 1976 to the Spring Semester, 1977. Specifically, this project involved the addition of Social Problem Solving Training to the curriculum of sixth grade students.

Briefly, Social Problem Solving (SPS) is the application of general problem solving strategies to interpersonal situations, according to Goldfried and Goldfried (1975, p. 104):

The general goal in problem-solving training is not to provide individuals with specific solutions to specific problematic situations, but rather to provide general coping strategies, so that they may be in a better position to deal more effectively with a wide variety of situational problems.

Our model of the social problem solving process can be outlined in five steps (Allen, Chinsky, Larcen, Lochman & Salinger, 1976; Goldfried & Goldfried, 1975; McClure, 1975):

a. **Orientation to problem solving** - acquiring the attitude that individuals are capable of solving their own problems.

b. **Problem identification** - identifying problems and defining them in specific terms.

c. **Generating alternative solutions** - brainstorming for the purpose of identifying the maximum number of possible solutions.

d. **Consideration of consequences** - evaluating available solutions in terms of their probable outcomes.
e. **Elaboration of solutions** - specifying the steps necessary to carry out the chosen solution.

This paper is designed to describe the process of entering the school system, developing the intervention and devising the techniques of measurement and maintenance of the project. Research findings on the effects of this project with sixth graders are not included in the present paper but will be published at some future time.

This paper is arranged into five major sections which are chronologically ordered. The first section is a historical overview dealing with the background of the project, entry into the school system, initial environmental assessment of the system and system maintenance procedures. Part II is a discussion of the three types of training carried out as part of the project: teacher training, in class pupil training, and undergraduate assistants' training. The evaluation methods are included in Part III; the process of linking resources is described in Part IV. The final section deals with the family intervention strategy which evolved at the end of the school intervention project. A calendar which the formation of the project's components is presented in Table 1.

**PART I - HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

**Background**

Prior to initiation of the project the middle school had been the subject of much local concern. Parents charged that students were not being educated in an acceptable social or psychological environment. It is difficult to portray the unhappiness and anger many of the parents expressed over the manner in which the school was being run. Parents, on an individual basis and in groups, went to the Superintendent of Schools demanding that the principal and some members of the administrative staff be removed from the school. The
following is a list of some of the parents' concerns which were presented to the School Superintendent:

a. Black students were rejected by white teachers.

b. White students were looked down upon by teachers because they continued to receive their education in the public school system.

c. Teachers lacked morale, competence and professionalism.

d. Although the school had a student population that was 90-93% black it had no black administrative staff.

e. Discipline measures used in the school were ineffective and antiquated.

f. Six and nine-tenths percent of all white children were suspended and 14.9% of all black children were suspended during the 1972-1973 school term.

Eventually the principal was given a higher level appointment, removing him from the school. However, the parents were concerned that the problems in school were not going to be eliminated by the removal of one individual. Because of this concern several parents were looking for programs which might benefit the school.

L. McClure, Ph.D. presented a colloquium in the Spring of 1975 at the University of South Carolina on Social Problem Solving (SPS). Dr. McClure's findings indicated that the SPS training had the potential of improving the social functioning of individuals receiving the training. Shirley Fitz-Ritson, the PTA president who was also a psychology graduate student was present at the colloquium and later discussed this presentation with the District Superintendent in charge of middle schools and with the new principal at the school. Both expressed an interest in meeting Dr. McClure if he came to work in South Carolina.
Subsequently in January 1976, Ms. Fitz-Ritson arranged a meeting with the new principal, Dr. McClure, and herself. The outcome of the meeting was the enthusiastic support of the principal for initiating a SPS project in the school.

The original research team was formed in February 1976. The team consisted of Dr. McClure and five students (one of which was PTA president) in the Clinical-Community Psychology graduate program. Initial team meetings were spent in orienting the team to SPS as an intervention strategy and developing our team objectives. Undergraduate students joined the team as assistants in various aspects of the program. By the Spring semester (1976) thirteen university undergraduates were involved. Most were psychology majors and all received academic credit in psychology for their participation.

**Entry and system maintenance**

Two questions frequently asked by school researchers are "how do I get into the system?" and "how do I stay in?" These were the questions we asked ourselves as we developed an action plan and proceeded to begin our intervention.

**Entry.**

Our objectives for this entry stage were not only to gain permission and support to introduce a social problem solving curriculum in a middle school; but also we aimed for an attitude of ownership and collaboration on the part of the students, parents, teachers, and school administrator. We wanted them to feel responsible for and excited about the project and we wanted them to take their rightful place in the project, as experts in the workings of their own school environment.

Our method to reach these objectives can be broken down broadly into three basic ideas: a) "go through the front door" - be open about payoff,
and goals and what we could offer in return b) assess the needs and concerns of the system, in order to understand the school environment and to tailor the problem solving program to the specific needs of this school, and c) enter slowly enough to pilot methods, and be flexible enough to use feedback and reactions.

From the onset of the project, an attempt was made to establish a good relationship between the research team and the school staff members. In an early meeting with the teachers two points, noted by Allen, et al. (1976), were emphasized. We focused our project on their school not as a criticism of the handling of educational tasks, but because the school setting provides a unique setting for preventive interventions. The school personnel constitute a group of concerned and approachable individuals willing to provide for more than academic needs. The other point emphasized was that although we claimed expertise in general principles of behavior management and intervention technology, the teachers were seen as the experts on the setting where the principles were to be applied.

With these objectives and methods in mind we began to assess the school environment. Important considerations were political stresses on the school, racial make-up, neighborhoods which made up the school population and who were the key figures in administration and parents' organizations.

As we entered we collected more information such as how children are assigned to classes, experience level of teachers, and resources in the school. Official gatekeepers. The next step was to encounter the official gatekeepers: University Research Committees, the School Board and the Principal. Official university permission to do research in the school was obtained through established University Committees. We began at this time to also
check out other resources within the University which could help us in or project—notably, funds available for equipment and materials available for training. The School District was approached with the advice of a University faculty School Psychologist who worked closely with district officials. Once we received approval of the district we could use this endorsement in our future public relations work.

Teachers. We met with teachers to introduce ourselves, explain our general goals and get their suggestions. Their initial response was cautious and skeptical. We attribute their "wait and see" attitude to their previous experience with projects, either governmental or university research, over which they had little control or input. Also it appeared as if participation in the project was an extra burden that the principal was giving the teachers without much enticement or reward for co-operation.

Our reaction to these problems was a) to make our motivation and payoffs clear—we let it be known that we were variously expecting to get research credits, publications, fulfillment of course requirements, assistantship requirements, and so forth, b) we offered alternative, optional payoffs for teachers who would become involved as members of our research team, such as: graduate credit hours, State Education Department credit units, and relief from resource room duty in return for attending workshops during their regular planning period, and c) we attempted to meet their expressed needs and concerns, to validate their ideas as important and meaningful to us.

All regular sixth grade teachers were interviewed individually during their free periods. The purpose of the interview was to get an idea about what problems of the children come to the attention of these teachers, and
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to understand how teachers felt about the problems confronting these children. During the interviews a variety of problematic behaviors were mentioned by teachers (such as rough language, hitting, fighting, stealing, and lying). Home problems were frequently mentioned. Half the teachers identified cultural (Black/White) differences as a source of problems for these sixth grade children.

Parents. We wanted parents to be involved and supportive of our program so we focused on making them aware of our project and its significance. We also felt it was important to become identified as members of the school community. We attended PTA meetings, open house, and the school spaghetti supper to become familiar faces and to demonstrate our intentions and be available to talk with parents and teachers.

During open house we demonstrated our teaching materials and handed out descriptions of our program and again, made ourselves available for questioning. In addition, that spring we sent a descriptive letter home to parents of sixth graders, along with a permission blank to be signed. Pre-testing this permission blank proved to be important. We learned that the title of our program: Social Problem Solving drew a defensive response from some parents ("my child doesn't have any problems"). We changed the title to Social Effectiveness Training when we sought parental permission the following fall. To counteract parental apathy we phoned parents who did not respond to our request for permission and answered any questions they had about our program. We felt that the phone calls emphasized the program's importance and that it was a regular part of the school program carried out with the regular classroom teacher. Unfortunately a significant portion of the
children's homes had no phone so we sent a letter home with the student. An additional attempt to obtain permission slips was made by holding an assembly for sixth graders to stimulate their interest in the program.

An assessment of family approaches to problem solving was developed and administered to a sample of parents. Although not very successful in collaborating with the Parents' system at that time, we did manage to gain the support of the most influential people in this group. We were not blocked in our efforts to implement the program. Since that time this aspect of the project has been readdressed with more successful results.

Students. Our contact with the sixth graders themselves during Spring 1976 involved both piloting our training materials and evaluating the types of problems these children actually have in school. The informal talks with the children were conducted with two classrooms. First the children were asked to list problems they have in the sixth grade. Next, children were divided into small groups and were interviewed by a team member.

From the written exercise we discovered a low level of literacy skills which precluded most written work in the program. In the written exercise, however, fighting and teasing were the most frequently named problems. Main problems mentioned in small groups were (in order of frequency): physical violence (fighting, bullying, "picking at", blackmail), problems with the teacher, verbal aggression (fussing at, cursing, namecalling), environmental and family problems. While we were present in the school to conduct the interviews informal observation verified these reports from teachers and children and we began at this point, to develop a behavioral assessment instrument which would give us information on the problem solving interactions between students and teachers.
The overall picture from the students' perception seemed to be that the school was a scary place to be a sixth grader. Older children pick on the sixth graders, the youngest members of the middle school. Children often gave money to older children to avoid confrontation. Children were generally disappointed in the response of their teachers to these problems. Teachers were perceived by kids as indifferent and non-supportive of their requests for help.

**Systems maintenance.**

To show that we were committed to keeping up communication between the project and the school staff, the role of project-school liaison person was established. Susan McCammon spent time at the school by attending faculty meetings and two days per week being in the teachers' lounge during the planning period (which also served as a break for the sixth grade teachers). Through this contact, Ms. McCammon was able to perform the following functions by tapping both the formal and informal communication networks:

a) public relations, b) rumor control and early warning to the project of problems at the school, and c) scheduling, coordination. The liaison person legitimated herself to the teachers by working as a substitute one day when a sixth grade teacher of a particularly disruptive class was absent.

Research team members occasionally ate in the school cafeteria.

In the system of this school, the rapport building and liaison work was vital. The school is a chaotic place; there are constant changes in policies and schedules. Without being present in the school as much as we were, we would not have been aware of the constant shifting of schedules and children's classroom placement. We would also have been unable to understand the situation of the teachers and could not have
gained their trust.

Included in the measures we took to insure that we were allowed to remain within the school's system are points which Phyllis Elardo of Project Aware (1975) calls "factors responsible for success". The points, as we applied them, were the following: a) there was a need indicated for some type of intervention (described in the history section), b) we had the support of educational leaders (see entry section), c) a dramatic change was not required at the onset of the project, d) we had the support of the teachers and the principal, particularly because we were willing to work directly with the children and were involved in the classroom training. A curriculum and a workshop were produced and training the teachers and group leaders was an important part of the program. We met for training meetings during school hours at the convenience of the teachers. It was arranged so that the teachers had extra incentives for their involvement (i.e. credits needed for promotion). e) The teachers and principal were required to take some responsibility in the project, meeting our objective of establishing an attitude of ownership and collaboration on the part of the school staff was a difficult and continuing task. f) The teachers, workshops and the classroom training were held at regularly scheduled times, g) There was continuity in that the group which first served as a control also received the training and we worked at maintaining communication with parents to inform them of the project and familiarize them with it. h) The project was always in the process of development and was open to creative additions. We were flexible to the expressed needs of the teachers. It was through our attention to these factors that we ensured the tolerance
of the school for our involvement in its system and avoided the rejection phenomenon experienced by many who would intervene in a school.

PART II - TRAINING

Since Ms. Fitz-Ritson had past experience in developing training modules, she took primary responsibility for the training component of the project. Previous research in this area had very limited training components, therefore, it was felt that an expanded training program would enhance the overall treatment effect. The training component of the project had three major divisions: an in-service workshop for the teachers and research team members, a workshop for the undergraduate assistants (who led the second series of in-class sixth grade training) and the actual training of the sixth grade students.

Training teachers and graduate students

The training for the teachers and graduate students began in the Fall 1976, ran for 18 weeks, and was divided into three segments. During the first eight-week segment, Dr. McClure presented a series of short lectures on the SPS strategy. Readings (a list of which is available from the authors) were assigned to the group which covered the following areas: the importance of building a trust relationship with the sixth graders, other SPS research, the five stages of SPS, and the importance of internality versus externality in SPS. Some of the materials (Problem Solving Measure, SPS workbook and poster) were co-developed with the teachers. The teachers were also asked to make suggestions as to the appropriateness of the video tapes for their students. (Selected tapes from the Inside/Out series were used.)

The goal of the second segment of the workshop was to help the teachers
develop specific behavior management strategies for students who needed more than a primary prevention program. Dr. McClure and research team members used lectures, group exercises and assignments to introduce behavior modification as a classroom management technique.

The last four weeks of the workshop the teachers assessed their individual and professional goals for the school and looked at conflict within the system which had an indirect bearing on the project. It was felt that the conflicts among teachers, administrators, and between teachers and administrators have strong implications for any future systems intervention.

Training undergraduate research team members.

The second major division of the training was the undergraduate workshops. Nine undergraduate students were trained to be group leaders for the Spring semester 1977.

Since several of the undergraduate assistants expressed concern over their inability to understand what the black students were saying Claudia Felder and Ms. Fitz-Ritson developed a training module to help the group leaders develop an awareness of the phonetic and structural differences in black English and standard English. Readings, discussion, and viewing unedited videotapes of conversations of black children from the community (who were not involved in the research) were used in the training.

Since the socio-economic and cultural background of the undergraduate assistants and the middle school students were very different a local substance abuse counselor conducted a three hour workshop on Values Clarification. The workshop stressed the importance of the undergraduates being aware that their value system might not be the same as that of the sixth graders with whom they would be working and the importance of accepting,
while not necessarily embracing, the values of the students.

During the initial weeks of the undergraduates' training, the characteristic behaviors of sixth graders, potential problems, and the behavior management responsibilities of the assistants were discussed to prepare them for their role as group leaders.

The last six weeks of the undergraduates' training were focused on the in-class training. During the workshop sessions, the lecture for each unit was discussed; the video tapes were viewed; leading the discussion groups was role played; the role play exercises for the students were discussed; and the closure procedure for each unit was reviewed. Group leaders were encouraged to share experiences (problems and successes) from the previous week's in-class training.

In addition, the undergraduates were trained to administer and score measures which were used in the evaluation of the project.

Approximately 160 sixth graders were involved in the project. The children's training involved exposure to videotapes; mini-lectures on the five stages of the SPS strategy and three lessons on integrating the five strategies: group discussion; role play activity; creative expression of the SPS steps (SPS workbooks, posters, and videotapes of their role-play activities).

PART III - PROGRAM EVALUATION

The children (N=160) were randomly assigned to either experimental (trained) or control classroom groups. Teachers (N=6) were used as the primary change agents and introduced the experimental students to the SPS curriculum through a sequence of in-class SPS lessons (e.g. problem identification, generating alternative solutions, consideration of consequences).
The program's impact was assessed on the individual, small group, and classroom level. In addition, the mediating influence of teacher-student interactions, the teacher's work environment and the children's family environments were assessed.

**Individual measures.**

Program impact on the individual was assessed in several ways. As part of the formulative evaluation process the effectiveness of each particular lesson was monitored weekly by means of an In-Class Measure (ICM). These were quizzes or exercises designed specifically for each lesson and introduced as games. In addition, lessons were critized by teachers in the weekly in-service training. By monitoring the extent to which material was assimilated, weak areas could be re-emphasized and remedial help could be given when needed. These measures also demonstrated how the curriculum would be changed "next time" to make it better.

There were two individual measures of overall impact of the program: an individual Problem Solving Measure (PSM) and a locus of control measure. Pre- and post-treatment PSM's were given to all sixth graders individually by trained undergraduate students. These measures consisted of several short vignettes, each vignette described a problematic situation which could happen to a sixth grader. Different stories were included in the PSM's administered after the SPS curriculum. The usefulness and scoring technique for the PSM's have previously been demonstrated (McClure, 1976).

The Internal-External Locus of Control measure (Norwicke-Strickland) was administered (pre- and post-) in classroom groups. A graduate student read the items, and individuals marked their own answers.
Small group measures.

After the experimental group completed their problem solving training, a behavioral measure of group problem solving was administered to all sixth graders. The purpose of this measure was to assess ability to utilize problem-solving skills in the context of a small group. This measure was called "Satan's Club" (after the school mascot) and was presented to the children as a television game show. Groups of children were instructed to set up a club. During the organizational process, the group was faced with several problems (e.g., not enough chairs, not enough club offices for everyone to have a title, etc.). The reactions and problem-solving strategies of the children were videotaped, as part of the ruse and as a record to score the effectiveness of their problem solving. This structured behavior assessment had previously been used and validated in a study of social problem solving (McClure, 1976).

School environment.

The mediating influence of the school setting on the child's coping behavior was assessed with social climate scales and classroom behavior observations. The Classroom Environment Scale and the Work Environment Scale (Moos, 1974) were both used in the assessment. A behavioral classification system was devised specifically to record the observed teacher-student problem-solving interactions.

Family environment.

Family contributions to the children's coping behaviors were explored with a sample of families (N=21) using the Family Environment Scale (Moos, 1974) and family interviews conducted in the home.
PART IV - LINKING

An increasingly important role in the consultation and change agentry of the community psychologist is that of resource linker or liaison. This role entails identifying a problem or need and then facilitating the exchange of appropriate resources within and among relevant systems. These linkages span the range of levels for intervention: they may be between individuals, between individuals and groups, among agencies, or may involve various combinations of levels (for further explanation see McClure, 1977).

The linkages developed during the course of the SPS program constituted an important accomplishment of the project. These linkages have been our vehicle of approaching a primary goal of the liaison specialist, which is "to enable systems to function for people for human development needs" (Dokecki, 1977, p.14). The problems identified in the school were broad in nature. The SPS curriculum, an enhancement and skill building project, was in itself not designed to directly intervene in the current chaotic condition of the school. However, through being involved in the project, gaining the involvement of members of the system and linking various resources we were able to influence the environment containing the SPS intervention. This influence evolved from identifying and approaching problems among the teaching and administrative staffs, helping the School Psychologist to enter the system and increasing her involvement and that of the sixth grade parents.

This section briefly describes the linkages and how they were made. A diagrammatic scheme adapted from Emiley, et al., (1977) presents the linkages prior to and following our intervention. In the original presentation (SEPA, 1977) the diagrams were presented on an overhead pro-
jector and separate transparencies were included for each aspect of the project (i.e. linkages from the viewpoints of the Research Team, School Psychologist, School, parents and PTA, and within institutions). In the interest of conserving space and eliminating repetition of material, only the post-intervention perspectives of the Research Team, School Psychologist, and within institutions are presented in this paper, as they encompass most of the liaisons established throughout the project. Linkages prior to the initiation of the SPS Project are portrayed in Figure 1.

The newly formed Research Team (described in History Section) had little access to resources within the University system. The professor involved had some contact with professors in the School Psychology Program. The School Psychologist was a graduate of the University School Psychology Program. Graduate students on the Team were familiar with library resources. Contacts of the Middle School included the School Board and Superintendent's Office, the PTA and through that group more contact with white parents than with black. Weak bonds existed between the Principal and Vice-Principal, the Guidance Counselor and Vice-Principal, sixth grade Teachers and Principal, and the Teachers and Guidance Counselor.

However, by the end of the year of the SPS program many more resources were tapped and annexed (See Figure 2). The initial linkages developed were
those which formed the Research Team. Skills brought to the group by each member were reviewed and tasks divided, so that each member ultimately had an area for which she/he had major responsibility. Resources within the University system were employed; faculty members in the School Psychology Program gave consultation and offered opportunities to discuss our progress with other professionals more familiar with working in schools. Undergraduates were screened and joined the project as invaluable classroom observers, small group leaders, and aides in data gathering and scoring. Video-tapes were located at South Carolina Educational Television for classroom training and were recorded for our use by the University Instructional Services Department. Team members contacted and consulted a University computer lab specialist in social science research.

The initial attempts at setting up communication with the parents of the sixth graders were our visits to PTA functions. Parents were also contacted by letter and in some cases additionally by phone to inform them of the project and obtain permission for their children to participate. Further involvement of the parents is detailed in the Family Intervention section.

Although our beginning contact with the school was through the principal we didn't rely on her as our main contact person. The basic and most essential contacts were with the sixth grade teachers through our weekly meetings and the students with whom we met weekly in the Problem Solving classes. Our resource exchange with the sixth graders consisted mainly of our providing them with interesting and enjoyable sessions designed to build problem-solving competencies in return for their input into our curriculum and their participation in our study. To their teachers we offered
the opportunity to become familiar with the concept of Social Problem Solving as an important skill, instruction in how to teach it, and State Department of Education credits. During the second semester as we trained the second group of students the emphasis of the teacher workshops shifted, as requested by the teachers. They felt they were sufficiently familiar with some of the difficult classroom related problems they faced. These included large classes, children far below grade level, inadequate texts and materials, in some cases teaching assignments in fields they did not feel qualified to teach, and extreme discipline problems in the classrooms. Behavior modification consultation was provided to improve classroom control. The teachers' responses to the Work Environment Scale (Moos, 1973) were used to initiate a focus on the school environment and how problems in that system were affecting the staff. In return the teachers relinquished their hour break one day per week for the teacher training meetings. Three of the teachers actually participated in the classroom training leading a small group weekly. It required effort on the part of the teacher for their children to be involved in the classroom training and the assessment measures, as this disrupted the ongoing routine and complicated their lesson planning in order to compensate for the spent classroom time. The teachers were overloaded by demands from many directions, and although we felt our project offered benefits commensurate to the efforts required it nevertheless was one more source of demands.

The Vice-Principal proved to be a helpful person. Having worked at the school many years he gave us historical background and offered a viewpoint of the school from a perspective we had not seen. He aided us in scheduling, locating students for assessment, placing those who did not have
parental permission to participate, and securing rooms for our needs. The teachers worked closely with him especially in the area of classroom discipline problems. He was invited and did attend several of the teacher training sessions after the emphasis focused on classroom and school problems. Another important person on the school staff was the Guidance Counselor who also attended the later teacher meetings and was involved in the Family component of the project.

It appeared that in addition to our benefits from linkage with resource people in the school, linkages already among those within the school were affected by our project. First, the sixth grade teachers had an opportunity provided to express and share many of their concerns, and seemed to develop an increased sense of being a group in themselves. Also their communication with the Vice-Principal and Guidance Counselor was improved. While their relationships with the students would have deepened over the course of the school year regardless of our intervention, through the SPS program the teachers were able at times to see skills in students which did not surface in the regular classroom situation.

The involvement of the School Psychologist was an essential element of linking services to the school, which prior to our intervention had not requested nor received any services from the School Psychologist during the beginning of the project year or recent prior years. As we were asked for consultation regarding problematic students in the classroom we established contact with the School Psychologist assigned to our school. An in-service program was set up in which the School Psychologist attended a Middle-School faculty meeting, introduced herself, and explained the services she could (and was anxious to) provide. Teachers referred individual problem students to her.
We included her in our project meetings and worked at problem solving some of the difficulties the teachers faced. She attended the teacher workshops from our project when they covered these problems. In these meetings the Teachers, Vice-Principal, Guidance Counselor, and School Psychologist were frequently all present together, along with two members of our Team as their regular consultants.

This contact aided the School Psychologist in instituting a linkage with these people. It provided a unique opportunity for them to work together in a problem solving approach to difficulties which affected the work of each (see Figure 3). The contact of a school psychologist with teachers had typically consisted of consultation regarding individual students referred by the teacher as having difficulties. The school psychologist in the district encompassing our school is responsible to five schools, giving him or her a caseload of 1200-1300 children. Realistically this allows daily contact with three referred children and two or three teachers. The SPS Project helped to initiate a linkage with the entire Staff of the school by providing an opportunity for the Psychologist to explain her possible functions and publicize possibilities other than assessing individual students for removing them from the regular classrooms. The weekly workshops provided an opportunity to attempt to modify six classroom environments by teaching management techniques to the teachers. Relationships among the School Psychologist and the Guidance Counselor and Vice-Principal were strengthened. The potential for contacts with the home and family was increased. Through involvement with the Project the Psychologist
could act on a programmatic rather than on an individual case level. These contacts provided a basis for her to exercise a wider range of skills than those of testing and program planning for individual students.

PART V - FAMILY INTERVENTION

After working with the sixth graders in the problem solving workshops for the first semester, we began questioning whether the messages the children received from their families were contradictory to the training. That is, we became acutely aware of the possible differences of the coping skills of the population under investigation from children in an earlier study by the senior researcher (McClure, 1971). The questions that emerge are: (a) what is the relevance of the strategies being taught for the child in his immediate environment? (b) How can we build more effectively upon the strategies that are learned in the family? An exploratory study was designed by Ms. Felder to assess the role of the family environment as determinants of children's social problem solving strategies.

The questions sought to be answered through this survey are:
(a) How can the school and families communicate more effectively?
(b) What are the families' perceptions of the role and function of the school for their children?
(c) Do parents view the school's role in a similar manner to school personnel?
(d) How do parents' views differ from the school's view of its role in a child's social development?
(e) What problem strategies are reinforced by families?
(f) Is there congruence between family systems and school systems in the reinforcement of problem solving strategies?
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The ultimate goal of this study is to determine the needs of these families and then devise an appropriate intervention that will facilitate the training of social problem solving strategies with the target children. A subgoal, though not necessarily minor, is to establish a link between the school and families.

The study is being conducted by interviewing at least one family member (mother, father, grandmother, older sister, etc.), and having them complete the Moos Family Environment Scale.

The interview questions are designed to assess in addition to the above questions, parents’ or another significant adult’s knowledge of the kinds of problems that his/her child encounters in school, home or neighborhood. (For example: Does your child ever have problems at school, home or in the neighborhood? If so, what are the problems?) We are also interested in how parents instruct their children to solve problems. (What do you tell your child to do when he/she has a problem?) The preceding questions help determine if parents’ instructions are congruent with the strategies that are reinforced in the school systems.

The Moos Family Environment Scale is a forced choice scale that assesses the social climates of families along three dimensions: relationships, personal growth, and system maintenance. There are ten subscales divided among the three dimensions. (Moos, 1974)

The interview team consisted of Ms. Felder and six trained undergraduate interviewers. The training consisted of simulated interviews and discussions of necessary techniques and potential problems and how to deal with them. The team consists of five black and two white interviewers. Black interviewers were assigned to interview black families only, likewise white interviewers.
conducted interviews with white families only. Matching race of interviewers and families was decided upon to help insure that interviewers were sensitive to the interviewed family, also to facilitate rapport with the families and to gain the most accurate verbal reports possible.

In order to implement the study, approval was obtained from the school board, because the contact with the families was made through the student population by obtaining names and addresses from the school. The Director of Housing for the subsidized housing projects in which a significant number of the black families live was also contacted to gain support for the study. Prior to beginning the interviews, letters were sent to all the families outlining the intentions of the study.

Preliminary findings

Some general findings are:

a. Black parents generally feel alienated from the school. Possible factors are: the Blacks are inner-city children bused to a suburban school and inaccessibility of the school. (Black parents often do not have transportation to evening events such as PTA meetings because of bus schedules. This was mentioned specifically by two black parents aside from the questions asked during the interview.)

b. Parents, black and white, were often vague or unsure of interpersonal problems that their children have. A frequent response to the question about their child's problems in school was an answer concerning academic difficulties.

c. When a child does encounter problems at school most parents report that this information comes from the child's teacher, seldom directly
Social Problem Solving

from the child.

d. Parents tend to instruct children to rely on the teacher for problem resolutions at school.
e. At home or in the neighborhood, parents often intercede for the child when there is a problem (for example, parents stated that they instruct their children to come to them if they are having problems with other children).

SUMMARY

A social problem solving intervention and consultation program was initiated in an urban middle school. Initially, the intervention aimed at providing children with specific coping strategies. However, the program eventually encompasses a broad multilevel network.

The process of entering the school system involved teachers, parents, and students. Support and program administration were facilitated by means of a systems maintenance philosophy and the designation of a school liaison worker.

Training was aimed at a variety of levels: teachers, students and undergraduate assistants. An in-service workshop prepared the teachers to co-develop and implement the social problem solving curriculum. Undergraduates were trained to be group leaders. In addition to the curriculum, this training included awareness of black English, values clarification, and group management. Sixth-grade in-class training employed a variety of techniques: video-taping, role playing, discussion, and creative expression.

The social problem solving curriculum was evaluated by randomly assigning classes and designating groups to treatment or control conditions. The evaluation was designed to measure pre- and post-differences on a variety of
measures and also to determine environmental correlates of program effectiveness.

The consultation intervention expanded as resources were linked. School personnel, university resources, families and district psychological services had access to each other by means of the consultation team. Particularly, families became more involved during an assessment of family problem solving. The family assessment component to the problem solving intervention designates inroads to increase program effectiveness.
REFERENCES


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School years: 1973-1975</td>
<td>Local concern over school administration</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Parents presented grievances to school superintendent</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Principal replaced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 1975</td>
<td>L. McClure colloquium introducing Social Problem Solving Research.</td>
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<td>Fall 1975</td>
<td>Meeting between PTA president, Dr. McClure, and the school principal</td>
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<td>Spring 1976</td>
<td>Research team formed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Entry initiated</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research team familiarized with the school, its population and history</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Permission to do research in the school obtained: School Board and University Research Committee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Began collaborative process of program development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collected descriptive data about school</td>
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<td>Met with teachers to assess their needs and reactions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Initiated negotiation of compensation to teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Met with students to assess their problems and concerns</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Met with parents for assessment and introduction of program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Piloted permission blanks</td>
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<td>Piloted program materials</td>
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<td>Began development of classroom observation system</td>
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<td>Randomization of Fall 1976 sixth grade class assignments</td>
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<td>Fall 1976</td>
<td>School liaison position created</td>
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<td>Negotiation of compensation for teachers' involvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Pre-measures taken (PSE, I-E, CES, etc.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teacher and group leader in-service training began</td>
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<td>Program initiated with experimental groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Classroom behavioral observations initiated</td>
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<td>Late in semester training of undergraduate assistants began</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 1977</td>
<td>Experimental group completed problem solving curriculum</td>
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<td>Post-measures taken</td>
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<td>Problem Solving Curriculum initiated with control group</td>
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<td>Family Assessments initiated</td>
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<td>In-service workshop expanded to include classroom management techniques</td>
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<td>School Psychologist participated in in-service training</td>
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Time frame designated in terms of school semesters.
FIG. 3

Superintend. Office
School Board
School Psychologist

Middle School
Principal
Vice-Principal
Guidance Counselor
Sixth Grade Teachers
Sixth Grade Students
Research Team

School Program
Undergrads
Instructional Services
Library Resources
Computer Lab

University

PTA
Black Parents
White Parents

Strength of Linkage:
Strong
Moderate
Weak